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FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/655/Add.1), which contains the proposed budget for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for the 12-month period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997. During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General who provided additional information.

2. MINURSO was established by the Security Council in its resolution 690 (1991) of 29 April 1991 with the purpose of organizing and conducting a referendum to enable the people of Western Sahara to choose freely between independence or integration with Morocco. Its mandate has been extended by subsequent Council resolutions, the latest of which is resolution 1042 (1996) of 31 January 1996, by which the Council extended the mandate of the Mission for four months, from 1 February to 31 May 1996.

3. As indicated in paragraphs 11 and 12 of document A/50/655/Add.1, total resources made available to the Mission since inception to 31 May 1996 amount to $240,834,200 gross; estimated expenditures amount to $238,215,600 gross; and credits returned to Member States amount to $2,618,600 gross. As of 15 March 1996, a total of $231,320,712 had been assessed on Member States, while contributions received totalled $170,852,269. Outstanding assessments were reduced by $630,000 in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/83 of 15 December 1995.

4. The Advisory Committee was informed during its hearings that outstanding assessments, as at 31 March 1996, totalled $61.7 million. Furthermore, as regards the $8 million borrowed from other peace-keeping accounts to provide

necessary cash flow to the Mission, indicated in paragraph 12 of the report, the Advisory Committee was informed that $5 million had been paid back by MINURSO.

5. No trust fund has been established in support of the Mission. However, voluntary contributions in kind have been provided to MINURSO by the Governments of Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco, as well as by the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), whose respective annual value is estimated at $2,058,500, $30,000, $7,925,700 and $390,000, as indicated in annex V to the report of the Secretary-General.

6. The General Assembly, in its resolution 49/247 of 20 July 1995, authorized the Secretary-General to enter into commitments at a rate not to exceed $5,592,500 gross ($5,096,100 net) per month for the operation of the Mission after 30 September 1995, that amount to be assessed on Member States subject to the extension of the mandate of MINURSO beyond that date. An amount of $42,001,136 was subsequently assessed for the period from 1 October 1995 to 31 May 1996.

7. In the light of the Secretary-General's report of 19 January 1996 to the Security Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/1996/43), the Advisory Committee sought further information from the Secretariat regarding the progress of the identification process. The Secretary-General proposed two options to the Security Council. The first one, extending the mandate for four months ending 31 May 1996, was to provide enough time for the resumption of the identification process and opportunity to test the will of the parties "in deed rather than in words". The second one was to prepare plans for the phased withdrawal of MINURSO, since further extensions were unjustifiable without imposing conditions in terms of solutions to problems by specified dates.

8. The Security Council, in its resolution 1042 (1996) while extending the mandate of the Mission for four months ending 31 May 1996, states the following in its paragraph 7:

> "Supports the intention of the Secretary-General, in the absence of meaningful progress towards completion of the Settlement Plan, to bring the situation to the immediate attention of the Council, and invites the Secretary-General in this eventuality to submit for consideration a detailed programme for a phased withdrawal of MINURSO, in accordance with the second option contained in his report of 19 January 1996."

9. The next report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution is to be submitted to the Security Council by 15 May 1996.

10. The Advisory Committee was further informed that the Department of Peace-keeping Operations was sending a planning team to the area in mid-April in order to assess the situation in Western Sahara and to look at different options regarding a possible down-sizing of the Mission, as well as the logistic and financial implications, in the absence of progress in the identification process.

11. However, the Advisory Committee considered the budget presented in document A/50/655/Add.1, which assumes the continuation of the Mission and provides the

cost estimates for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, amounting to $52,335,000 gross ($48,456,000 net). Of this amount, 28 per cent is based on standard costs and ratios, while 72 per cent relates to mission-specific requirements. The budget is $14,775,000 gross lower than that of the previous 12-month period, a decrease of 22 per cent, owing to lower requirements under military and civilian personnel costs, air operations, other equipment and the non-provision for the support account for peace-keeping operations.

12. The Advisory Committee was informed that based on the 8.5 per cent of the civilian staff component of MINURSO, the amount that would have been included in the budget estimates for the funding of the support account would have amounted to $2,086,800.

13. Item 1 of the budget, Military personnel costs, amounting to $8,825,000, reflects the fully authorized strength of 240 military observers. Item 2, Civilian personnel costs, amounting to $28,089,000, provides for 160 civilian police monitors, 320 international staff, 90 local staff and 12 Organization of African Unity (OAU) observers. However, an overall estimated vacancy rate of 25 per cent was factored in when elaborating the civilian personnel costs, in the light of the actual and anticipated decrease in the identification activities and the uncertainty of their resumption.

14. Furthermore, upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that as at 31 March 1996, 112 posts out of the 320 authorized posts were vacant, thus a vacancy rate of 35 per cent for international civilian staff. This includes 55 staff at the Professional level and above actually on board out of the 132 authorized posts; and 152 General Service and other staff on board out of the 188 authorized posts. As regards civilian police, only 64 out of the 160 authorized had been deployed as of 31 March 1996. Even though the budget provides for a further deployment to 100 civilian police by July 1996, the costing in the budget does not provide for full incumbency in this respect, but factors in a 7.5 per cent vacancy rate for the whole period.

15. The Advisory Committee believes that the vacancy rate may increase in view of the current situation and developments in Western Sahara, and if there were to be no change in this regard, it trusts that underexpenditures will be reflected in the relevant performance report.

16. The Advisory Committee welcomes the restructuring of the air operations requirements. In its previous report on MINURSO (A/50/802), the Advisory Committee recommended particular attention be paid to restricting the use of aircraft to essential operational needs and that the most cost-effective contractual arrangement be made with aircraft suppliers. Based on the new terms of a contract, requirements for the hiring and operation of the required fleet, consisting of three helicopters, two Antonov AN-26 aircraft and one Beechcraft fixed-wing aircraft, have decreased from $8,748,000 for the previous 12-month period to $7,702,000 for the upcoming period, with a more rationalized use of block and extra hours available.

17. The Advisory Committee also notes that the provision under item 5, Transport operations, of $1,769,000, includes $293,000 for the purchase of nine new vehicles (see para. 19 below). This provision also includes $1,465,000,

which covers the freight charges for transporting 85 vehicles from Brindisi, spare parts, insurance and fuel to maintain and operate MINURSO's vehicle establishment of 320 units. The Advisory Committee was further informed that 78 out of those 85 vehicles were replacing existing ones in MINURSO.

18. The Advisory Committee also notes an amount of $622,000 is provided under item 3, Premises/accommodation. In its previous report on MINURSO (A/49/771/Add.1 of 29 March 1995), the Advisory Committee requested information on the occupancy of 50 rental apartments, as well as other accommodation provided to United Nations staff. Paragraph 24 of the Secretary-General's report (A/50/655/Add.1) indicates that these apartments were not required as envisaged, since the Identification Commission never operated at its full capacity as originally planned.

19. However, item 6 (a) of annex II.D to the same report indicates that a provision has been made for the rental of 70 apartments, at a cost of $400 per month per unit, in anticipation of the additional deployment of civilian personnel over and above the number deployed for the period ending 30 June 1996, and in the absence of confirmation from the host Government of the provision of additional premises. The Advisory Committee was informed that a better price had been obtained reducing the cost from $700 to $400 per unit, with all units being located in the same building. The Advisory Committee trusts that this contract will not be entered into unless it is ascertained that these accommodations are actually required, and that any action will depend on the decision taken by the Security Council regarding the future of the Mission. The same recommendation applies to the provision for the nine new vehicles mentioned in paragraph 17 above.

20. Paragraph 25 of the Secretary-General's report indicates the actions that appear to be needed to be taken by the General Assembly at its resumed fiftieth session in connection with the financing of MINURSO. The Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's proposal that the Assembly appropriate the amount of $44,740,000 gross ($40,768,800 net) for the operation of MINURSO for the period from 1 October 1995 to 31 May 1996, already authorized and assessed under the terms of Assembly resolution 49/247. The Advisory Committee also recommends appropriation and assessment of the amount of $5,592,500 gross ($5,096,100 net) for the financing of MINURSO from 1 to 30 June 1996, subject to a decision by the Security Council to extend the mandate beyond 31 May 1996; as well as the appropriation and assessment of the amount of $52,335,000 gross ($48,456,000 net) for the maintenance of the Mission for the 12-month period beginning on 1 July 1996, to be assessed at the rate of $4,361,250 gross ($4,038,000 net) per month, subject to the extension of the mandate by the Security Council. It is evident, nevertheless, that the Advisory Committee is making these recommendations on the assumption that the Mission will continue; but if the Security Council were to change the mandate of MINURSO, or decide on down-sizing or withdrawal, the Secretary-General should report back to the General Assembly with revised cost estimates for the Mission.